



The Democrat and the Dictator: Comparing Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe

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Abstract

This paper compares and contrasts Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe, two of Africa's most recognisable figures. These two leaders had a lot in common in terms of their childhood, education, contributions they made in creating military wings for their political organisations, and imprisonment. However, they differed widely in their personalities, communication skills, outlook on negotiations, receptiveness to criticism, and views on liberty and democracy. These differences arguably impacted the decision making on how the two individuals eventually dealt with the transitions in their countries and how they managed the 'post-liberation' periods. Under Mandela, South Africa thrived politically and economically, while the impact of Mugabe's leadership on Zimbabwe has been characterised by large-scale human rights abuses and a series of economic crises.

Introduction

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) and Robert Mugabe (1924-present) are two of Africa's most recognisable leaders. Both were born under similar circumstances and each of these leaders had significant impacts on their people. Nonetheless, the political and economic outcomes of their decisions are very different.

Mandela, also affectionately referred to as 'Madiba', is celebrated as one of modern history's most significant figures. In fact, U.S. President Barack Obama called Mandela "the last great liberator of the 20th century," and likened him to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln.

In contrast, Mugabe (also known as 'Uncle Bob'), who turned 91 years old on 21 February 2015, is considered to be a dictator by some (but not all). In 2003, after being compared to Adolf Hitler by the British press, Mugabe stated, "I am still the Hitler of the time. This Hitler has only one objective, justice for his own people, sovereignty for his people, recognition of the independence of his people, and their right to their resources. If that is Hitler, then let me be a Hitler tenfold. Ten times Hitler, that is what we stand for" (Hentoff 2012).

The primary objective of this article is to compare and contrast the lives of Mandela and Mugabe as well as the decisions that they have made in relation to the people whom they claimed to serve. This article is not a comprehensive overview of everything that the two leaders

have done or achieved as that is a task for historians. Rather, it attempts to identify a number of issues that can reasonably be compared with one another in order to understand these individuals, their views, and the policy decisions that they made.

Growing up

In 1918, Rolihlahla (meaning ‘troublemaker’) Mandela was born in a small village in the Transkei, South Africa. At the time, Apartheid as an official policy had not yet come into being, but the precursors to the racist regime were already present. Mandela’s father was one of the chiefs of the Thembu people and his mother was his father’s third wife. Growing up, Mandela spent most of his time with his mother and three of his sisters in his mother’s kraal.

Although both of Mandela’s parents were illiterate, they recognised the value of education and sent their son to a local Methodist school, where at the age of seven, his school teacher, unable to pronounce Rolihlahla, named him ‘Nelson’.

Around the age of nine, Mandela’s father died, but he found solace in his other family members. In his *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela (1995: 3-70) describes his childhood as being simple and joyful, and he admitted that he was somewhat ignorant of the world outside of his local village. He also loved playing with other boys and often attended to cattle.

Six years after Mandela’s birth, Mugabe was born at Kutama Mission, in Southern Rhodesia. Like Mandela, Mugabe was born during a time period when non-Whites were discriminated against. Mugabe was the third of six children, two of whom died at an early age. His father was a carpenter and his mother a schoolteacher. With regards to political awareness, Mugabe claimed that he knew at a young age that his forefathers were dispossessed from their lands by White colonialists (Tambo 2013).

Like Mandela, Mugabe no longer had a father in his life by the time he was about ten years old. The big difference is that while Mandela’s father died, Mugabe’s father abandoned the family in 1934 as he went in search for work. After that, Mugabe’s mother was left to fend for the family (Holland 2008a: 224).

Compared to other Africans in the region, Mandela and Mugabe receive good secondary education. Mandela attended at a number of Western education institutions. Mugabe received his early education at mission schools and studied at the exclusive Kutama College under the supervision of an Irish priest, Father Jerome O’Hea (Meredith 2008: 21). As Mugabe was a smart child, he was “promoted to the next level as soon as he could hold his own ... [and as a result he] was always younger and physically smaller than his contemporaries” (Holland 2008a: 6).

Where Mandela and Mugabe differ most from one another during their youth is their social skills. While Mandela liked to play and interact with others, fellow classmates often made jokes at the expense of Mugabe, the bookworm. Recently, during Dali Tambo’s (2013) interview with Mugabe on *People of the South*, the nonagenarian described himself during his boyhood as “reserved”, but claims that he played “tennis ball with other boys” and “indulged in boxing”. He also said that as a boy he would always have a book with him while cattle herding. Others characterise the young Mugabe as a bit more of a loner and solitary than what Mugabe would

admit. His own brother described him as “a person who was not interested in having many friends. His books were his only friends” (Holland 2008a: 5).

In later years Mandela and Mugabe carried some of the character traits that were already present during boyhood. Many South Africans tell stories about how they encountered Mandela in all sorts of unexpected places. Such stories all have one thing in common: Mandela remained a very approachable person. He often escaped from his bodyguards in order to enjoy the company of ordinary South Africans. He was also comfortable surrounding himself with people that were smarter than him and often heeding their advice (Russell 2009: 20).

Compared to South Africans and their anecdotes about Mandela, ordinary Zimbabweans have fewer stories about personal encounters with Mugabe. As was the case during his childhood, he remains somewhat isolated from others (if not cold). Mugabe goes everywhere with his over the top entourage. Once, during an interview with *Carte Blanche*, Mandela boyishly chuckled when he mentioned Mugabe’s excessive motorcade (Nehandaradio 2013). In fact, in Zimbabwe, Mugabe’s motorcade, which consists of numerous policemen on motorcycles and in vehicles, as well as army personnel with automatic weapons, has a notorious reputation. Other than causing numerous accidents (*The Telegraph*, 2012), people have reportedly been assaulted for allegedly not stopping completely when the motorcade is close by. There are also allegations of murder against members of Mugabe’s motorcade (Mushava 2012).

To be clear, neither Mandela nor Mugabe lacked charisma. Even Mugabe can charm his most ardent opponents and make them feel important. However, in terms of popularity, people lined up to see Madiba because they loved him. There were many people (including former enemies) that called him a “friend” (Murray 2013). In contrast, as was the case when he was a boy, Mugabe appears to have no friends. Even one of Mugabe’s close associates once describes him as “disdainful” and “aloof” (Holland 2008a: 191). While Mugabe’s first public appearance in Zimbabwe after years in exile drew large crowds, his popularity has decayed in later years. From the late 1990s onwards, it became common for people to be frog-marched to rallies or events where Mugabe deliver speeches, while others are bribed with food and clothing.¹ As was the case when he was boy, Mugabe remains an isolated individual.

Tertiary education

By 1939, Mandela started doing a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree at the University of Fort Hare, which at the time, was an elite Black institution in the Eastern Cape. At Fort Hare, Mandela remained socially active and met a number of other African intellectuals, including his lifelong friend and future president in exile of the African National Congress (ANC), Oliver Tambo. He also became more and more exposed to politics. Although he was not yet an ANC member, he partook in an election for the Students Representative Council (SRC). Mandela was elected to the SRC, but due to a political decision which he describes as “morally right” he resigned from his position, which eventually led to his temporary expulsion from the university in 1940

¹ This author spoke to a number of victims in Zimbabwe (2010-2013) who have been forced to attend ZANU-PF rallies.

(Mandela 1995: 61).

Within ten years of Mandela's expulsion from Fort Hare, Mugabe attended the same institution from 1950-1951. As was the case with Mandela, Mugabe rubbed shoulders with many African intellectuals and future leaders. After Fort Hare, Mugabe went on to study in Salisbury (1953), Gwelo (1954), and Tanzania (1955-57). In later years, whilst in prison, Mugabe "acquired three more degrees by correspondence ... bringing his number of degrees to seven" (Norman 2004: 62).

Although both leaders initially attended the same tertiary institution, their experiences with education differ vastly. As will be argued shortly, this possibly had an impact on their leadership styles in later years.

Formative years: Mandela the lawyer, Mugabe the teacher

In 1941, Mandela left for Johannesburg in an attempt to run away from an arranged marriage. His choice also meant "the birth of a freedom fighter" (Mandela 1995: 107). In Johannesburg, Mandela worked as an articled clerk at a law firm owned by a liberal Jew. At the firm, Mandela became increasingly exposed to inter racial and ethnical interactions. In Johannesburg, Mandela met Walter Sisulu, who became his political mentor and friend. By 1944, Mandela was elected to the Executive Committee of the newly formed ANC Youth League and in 1947 he was elected to the Executive Committee of ANC's Transvaal region (Mandela 1995: 114, 124).

When in 1948 the National Party came to power in South Africa, they implemented the policy of Apartheid, which legalised and institutionalised political and social segregation amongst different races. Apartheid was designed to benefit and extend political and economic control of South Africa by the country's White minority. During the years that followed, the Apartheid system became increasingly oppressive, while Mandela became more and more active, both politically and legally, in fighting an unjust system (Mandela 1995: 128).

After a number of failed attempts to complete his LLB degree at the University of Witwatersrand, Mandela opted instead to pass a qualifying exam which would allow him to practice law. By 1952, Mandela opened his own law firm and he was later joined by Tambo. 'Mandela and Tambo' soon became a popular firm where Africans sought legal aid against the unjust Apartheid system (Mandela 1995: 171-173).

In 1951, Mandela played an active role in the Defiance Campaign which brought together approximately 8,500 people who voluntarily violated a host of unjust Apartheid laws (Mandela 1995: 151). Shortly thereafter, in 1955, Mandela secretly attended the Congress of the People to source views from South Africans, whether White or Black, about their ideals for the country. The result was the *Freedom Charter*, which, according to Mandela (1995: 203), influenced "the blueprint of the liberation struggle and the future of the nation."

During 1956, Mandela was arrested and unsuccessfully charged with treason. In 1961, after the Treason Trial, Mandela co-founded the ANC's military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), which means Spear of the Nation. Mandela was convinced that the ANC needed to take up an armed struggle, but he maintained that violence was to remain a last resort. His first preference

was negotiations with the government of the day, which were not forthcoming (Mandela 1995: 232-279).

After graduating from Fort Hare, Mugabe taught in Zambia (1955-58) and Ghana (1958-60). In Ghana, the first African country to gain independence, Mugabe met his first wife (Sally Heyfron) and he was exposed to Marxism and African nationalism. He was also influenced by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first President and Prime Minister (Norman 2004: 48).

Upon his return to Southern Rhodesia in 1960, Mugabe became publicity secretary for the National Democratic Party (NDP), which was led by Joshua Nkomo. NDP was a nationalist party that opposed British colonial rule. Meanwhile, the British and the White-controlled United Federal Party (UFP) agreed on the so-called 1961 Constitution, which gave 50 seats to Whites and only 15 seats to Blacks in the Rhodesian Parliament. Mugabe, having recently returned from Ghana, was outraged and remarked; "Europeans must realise that unless the legitimate demands of African nationalism are recognised ... then racial conflict is inevitable" (Norman 2004: 54).

In 1962, the NDP was banned and consequently Nkomo formed the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and Mugabe became the party's general secretary. In response to the UFP's proposals for greater Black integration, Ian Smith formed the right wing Rhodesian Front (RF), which won the elections. That same year, Apartheid South Africa declared itself a Republic and left the British Commonwealth (Norman 2004: 54).

In 1963, Mugabe lived in exile in Tanganyika. Whilst in Dar es Salaam, he broke ranks with Nkomo, and with a handful of former ZAPU members, formed the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) where he became the secretary general. The two political organisations also had their own military wings. In the 1960s, ZAPU formed the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) backed by the Soviet Union, and in 1965, ZANU formed its own military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), which was backed by China (Norman 2004: 64). From this point onwards, the two organisations developed deep ideological and ethnic divisions. ZANU was largely supported by the Shona while ZAPU gained the bulk of its support from the Ndebele (Nkomo 1984: 161-162).

It should be noted that compared to Mugabe, it seems that Mandela had more multicultural and multiracial experiences with fellow countrymen. For example, together with Mandela (1995: 232), there were 105 Africans, 21 Indians, 23 Whites, and seven Coloureds arrested in the run up to the Treason Trail. The development of the Freedom Charter was also a product of a multicultural and multiracial (from all walks of life) effort. Many of Mandela's friends in later years also came from different racial, ethnic and social groups. Although Mugabe was exposed to many Africans from different ethnic and national groups, the internal politics within his own party, especially at the senior level, became an issue of ethnicity (and even tribal). These factors arguably influenced these future leaders in their nation building projects (or lack thereof). After South Africa's first democratic elections, Mandela became known for embracing diversity and for promoting Archbishop Desmond Tutu's idea of the 'Rainbow nation'. In contrast, Mugabe became a racist and a xenophobe, openly calling for the killing of "others".

Reflecting on Mandela and Mugabe's education and formative years

Separated by only a few years, the two future leaders ended up at Fort Hare University, where they brushed shoulders with many of the continent's future leaders and intellectuals. While at Fort Hare, both had not yet chosen a path in party politics. However, at Fort Hare, Mandela made a political decision that he knew would get him expelled because he believed that it was "morally right" (Mandela 1995: 61). Soon thereafter he went to Johannesburg where he wanted to challenge the authorities, mostly through law but also via political acts.

One thing that Mandela perhaps took from his experience as a lawyer was to argue about issues in order to come to some form of conclusion about what is right and just. Mugabe, the teacher and the great intellectual, was probably never challenged in such a way by his students. He was the master and his subjects had to consume everything that he told them, as remains the case today. In reference to Morgan Tsvangirai (who became the Mugabe's enemy number one at the turn of the century), Mugabe once declared, "death to the tea boy" (Meredith 2008: 225). His language suggest that he remained a patronising teacher. His authority stemmed from his intellect while his enemies cannot be trusted as they are dumb, unreasonable and wrong. At issue here is not Mugabe's intellect, which by several accounts, is very well developed (Meredith 2008: 19-57). Rather, one should question whether Mugabe was ever willing to compromise and to accept that sometimes others have better ideas than his own.

Mandela was openly self-critical, as is evident throughout *Long Walk to Freedom*, an attribute that few politicians share. In his autobiography, Mandela (1995) leaves one with the impression that he constantly re-evaluated his choices and subsequent actions. He took responsibility for his choices and admitted when he made bad ones. Mandela also recognised his own prejudices, whether that was against other ethnic groups, or people with different ideological positions.

On his weakness, Mandela said, "that was one of the things that worried me – to be raised to the position of a semi-god – because then you are no longer a human being. I wanted to be known as Mandela, a man with weaknesses, some of which are fundamental, and a man who is committed, but nevertheless, sometimes he fails to live up to expectations" (The Guardian, 2013). And sometimes Mandela failed indeed.

One of Mandela's greatest failures as President was that he did not do enough to promote HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness (Russell 2009: 4, 5). Ironically though, Mandela was his own worst critic. He admitted that he should have done a lot more as President to tackle HIV/AIDS and in retirement he went on to establish a massive campaign to promote HIV/AIDS awareness, drawing on celebrities to spread the message.

In stark contrast with Mandela, Mugabe seems to be uncritical about his life. The result is that he blames everyone except himself for his mistakes. The chief culprits are usually White Zimbabweans, Britain (and particularly Tony Blair), the US, Western sanctions, and the MDC-T (who are in Mugabe's words merely "puppets of the West").²

² These propaganda messages were constantly rehearsed in the public media and at public forums by ZANU-PF when this authored lived in Zimbabwe from 2010-2013.

Holland (2008b), who describes Mugabe as “very developed intellectually, but not emotionally” might be correct. In this context, it is interesting to note that Google’s head of people operations, Laszlo Bock, recently revealed that the multi-billion dollar company does not always look for straight-A students when they hire new people. The reason being that straight-A students rarely fail with the result being that they are not always able to embrace other people’s ideas. According to Bock, “It’s ‘intellectual humility’ [that we are looking for]. Without humility, you are unable to learn ... Successful bright people rarely experience failure, and so they don’t learn how to learn from that failure” (Nisen 2014). Could it be that Mugabe, the unsocial, smart, intellectual bookworm, turned into a dictator lacking intellectual humility?

Imprisonment

In 1962, after an international tour to raise support for the ANC, Mandela and some of his comrades were arrested. What followed was the Rivonia Trial (1963-64). Following the Rivonia Trial, Mandela was convicted and spent 27 years in prison.

Prison life was hard for Mandela, where he continued to face discrimination. One of his goals was to fight the Apartheid system from within prison, which included advocating for the right to listen to the radio and read newspapers, and he had a number of incremental successes. Besides often presenting prisoners' issues to the warden, Mandela mentored many of his fellow inmates.

In his autobiography, Mandela describes how difficult it was for him to be separated from his family. He was not allowed to see his children and his then wife, Winnie Mandela, who was often obstructed (including jailed) by the Apartheid system which prevented her from seeing him. The first time Mandela was able to touch Winnie’s hand was after he spent 21 years in jail (Mandela 1995: 616). The couple also found it difficult to correspond with one another. For example, the prison authorities would censor letters between the two to the point where it was almost impossible to understand it.

Moreover, whilst in jail, Mandela lost many friends and relatives whose funerals he was not allowed to attend. In 1969, his first and oldest son was killed in a car crash, which, he said, “left a hole in my heart that can never be filled” (Mandela 1995: 531).

Upon Mugabe’s return to Rhodesia from Tanganyika at the end of 1963 (about one year after Mandela’s arrest after his international tour), he was imprisoned for 11 years due to his political activities. In 1965, the Rhodesian government, ruled by the White minority, declared independence from Britain. The latter responded by imposing sanctions against the Rhodesian government (Norman 2004: 60).

Mugabe utilised his time in prison to do a lot of studying. Like Mandela, Mugabe also provided education to some of his fellow inmates. Furthermore, as was the case with Mandela, he also had major restrictions placed against him. The authorities refused a request by Mugabe to attend his only child’s funeral. He saw his then wife, Sally, for the first time in 10 years, when he was briefly released from prison to attend negotiation processes in Zambia (Norman 2004: 65).

Holland (2008: 158) argues that there is evidence that Mugabe was tortured, both mentally and physically, whilst in prison, which could be “the reason for the terrifying anger he has shown

towards his own people in recent years.” She further argues, “Being prevented from attending his only child’s funeral ... may well have broken his heart, cracking him into pieces so that, like Humpty Dumpty, he could not be put together again” (Holland 2008: 158).

In a recent interview on *People of the South*, Mugabe was asked by Dali Tambo (2013), the son of Oliver Tambo, what he envisioned for Zimbabwe whilst in jail. Mugabe responded that he pondered a lot about the crimes committed by the White racist regime and thought, “these bastards, we are going to deal with them ...we said, some people are going to pay for this when we get out.” Mugabe was bitter, and he wanted revenge.

Roads to ‘freedom’

The roads to ‘freedom’ for Mandela and Mugabe were different, partly because of the political context in which they operated, and largely related to the fact that the two began to have different outlooks on life.

Mandela the negotiator

Whilst in jail, offers were made to Mandela by the Apartheid government to free him. However, his ‘freedom’ came with a host of conditions without a promise from the Apartheid government to abandon its policies. In 1985, then President P.W. Botha said he would release Mandela if he “unconditionally rejected violence as a political instrument” (Mandela 1995: 620).

Mandela (1995: 622) responded, “I am not a violent man ... it was only then, when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us, that we turned to armed struggle ... What freedom am I being offered while the organisation of the people remains banned? What freedom am I being offered when I may be arrested on a past offence?”

In other words, Mandela refused the offer to be ‘freed’ until the Apartheid government made a firm commitment to change the entire system for the benefit of everyone’s freedom. It demonstrates Mandela’s uncompromising belief in freedom and democracy for all.

Throughout Mandela’s imprisonment, the ANC and their allies, together with MK, continue to fight against the Apartheid regime. At home, the ANC began to make the country ungovernable and Apartheid became an expensive endeavour. Numerous African countries, and particularly the Frontline States, also offered refuge and military training for MK fighters. International condemnation of Apartheid finally reached its peak when, from the 1980s onwards, a significant group of Western countries began to impose economic sanctions against the Apartheid regime.

By 1985, Mandela started to cautiously conduct secret talks with a handful of high-level politicians and the security sector (Esterhuyse 2012; Sparks 1996: 26-110). At the time, he believed that the time for negotiating with the Apartheid regime was ripe. His efforts paid off and when he convinced leaders of the Apartheid regime that negotiations are preferable to violence. In 1990, President F.W. de Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC and other parties, freeing of political prisoners, and the lifting of a number of restrictions imposed during the State of Emergency. Mandela was released a few days later and the formal negotiation

process began. A year later, Mandela was elected ANC President, replacing his good friend Oliver Tambo.

Several further important negotiation processes started shortly after Mandela's release from prison; including the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in 1991, and CODESA II (1992). The processes culminated into an interim Constitution, which led South Africa into the country's first democratic election in 1994 (Sparks 1996: 120-239). These negotiation processes were intense, often happening at the same time as South Africa experienced extreme violence, ethnic, and racial tension. Violence also raged heavily between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party, often fuelled by racist elements within government, resulting in large casualties. According to Johnson (2004: 201), "of all the lives lost to political violence under National Party rule a good half were lost in the 1990-94 period after the abolition of Apartheid." Throughout this difficult period, Mandela demonstrated tremendous leadership (Russell 2009: 1, 2). He remained a reconciler and continued to engage his enemies. His ability and commitment to engage his enemies helped to move the parties from a position of mistrust to trust. By the time South Africans went to the polls for the country's first democratic elections, the event was relatively peaceful.

Mugabe the reluctant negotiator

As mentioned, Britain was unhappy about Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and insisted that the country should be controlled by the majority Black population. Consequently, Rhodesia was only recognised by a handful of countries, most prominently Apartheid South Africa and Portugal. Attempts to find a negotiated solution failed and the Rhodesian government continued to face pressure from ZANU and ZAPU and their military wings (Nkomo 1984: 147-153).

After his release from prison in 1975, Mugabe secretly crossed the Rhodesian border into Mozambique from where he led the bloody war against the racist Rhodesian regime (Meredith 2008: 4). In 1976, Mugabe emerged as ZANU's new leader.

At the end of 1975, ZANU and ZAPU formed a joint guerrilla army called the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA). The third in command of ZIPA, Wilfred Mhanda, described Mugabe as "secretive, stubborn and uncompromising" (Holland 2008: 179). Another liberation fighter (and former Minister of Education), Fay Chung (2006: 147), says that ZANU (newly under the leadership of Mugabe) believed that Nkomo's ZAPU "intended to take over the political leadership of the newly combined forces. Tensions were high, and ended in violence." As early as 1976, Mugabe started to purge his ranks of anyone who seems to be a threat (Holland 2008: 179).

By the mid-1970s, South Africa and the U.S. increased pressure on Smith to transform Rhodesia into majority rule. In 1979, Smith reached a power sharing agreement with urban based African nationalist parties to hold an election, but the agreement also ensured that Whites would continue to hold about one-third of parliamentary seats and to dominate senior positions in the security sector, civil service, and judiciary. ZANU and ZAPU were invited to take part in the

elections, but refused to partake as they were unhappy about the agreement, in which they did not participate. The United African National Council (UANC) led by Abel Muzorewa won the majority of votes and Muzorewa became Zimbabwe-Rhodesia's first Black Prime Minister.

The Bush War continued until 1979, when Britain, led by Margaret Thatcher, invited all political parties to Lancaster House to participate in a negotiation process. Mugabe, under pressure from Mozambique's President Samora Machel, reluctantly participated in the negotiation process, which lasted three months. At the last moment, after agreements on ceasefire arrangements, Mugabe threatened to walk out of the conference as he thought continuing the Bush War would put ZANU in a better position. President Machel again intervened and told Mugabe that "if he did not sign the agreement, he would be welcomed back to Mozambique and given a beach house where he could write his memoirs, but Mozambique would make no further sacrifices for a cause that could be won at the conference table" (Meredith 2008: 8).

Politics as a compromise versus a zero-sum game

Clearly, there was a lot more time invested into the negotiation process in South Africa compared to Zimbabwe. Mandela himself, as was seen above, spent time talking to his enemies. It arguably allowed the different parties to move from being 'enemies' to mere 'opposition'. In fact, in 1988, a special committee was formed which included amongst others, the Minister of Justice, the head and deputy of the National Intelligence, and the director general of the Prison Department. They had frequent, long (sometimes up to seven hours), detailed talks with Mandela whose diary notes forty-seven meetings in all (Sparks 1996: 36). In contrast, Mugabe was apparently "hostile" to "any idea of negotiations" as "imprisonment had only hardened his resolve to pursue revolution in Rhodesia ... he saw no reason to seek a compromise" (Meredith (2008: 2). Unlike Mandela, who saw the armed struggle as a last resort, "Mugabe regarded armed struggle as an essential part of the process of establishing a new society" (Meredith 2008: 2).

There was also no outside permanent interlocutor in the South African negotiation process, which meant that the parties themselves had to find solutions to the future of the new nation. Mandela and many of his party members made a point in meeting with radical elements in South Africa to talk about their concerns about the future. Mandela was also very careful to keep the ANC structures, including those in exile, well informed about the purpose of these behind the scenes talks. He knew that he could not make deals on behalf of the ANC without consent from fellow ANC members.

With regards to Zimbabwe's transition, there was active intervention by several countries – such as Britain, Mozambique, South Africa, the US, Tanzania, and Zambia - to facilitate the transition process (Nkomo, 1984). On numerous occasions, African presidents from other independent nations forced Mugabe to the negotiation table. In 1979, when Mugabe once again refused to negotiate with the other parties, President Machel from Mozambique told him that he would no longer offer ZANU space for its liberation war. Mugabe was furious (Meredith 2008:

7). While this had the advantage of forcing a peace process in Zimbabwe at an earlier stage (compared to South Africa), it is questionable whether the parties were able to iron out important issues about the country's future and to build trust.

Mandela approached politics as a matter of compromise involving many different stakeholders, while Mugabe viewed it as a zero sum game, which is also arguably why he has created a de facto one party state. Mugabe's lack of negotiations with his enemies (which included both Rhodesians and Nkomo's ZAPU), meant that distrust between the parties continued, thereby tainting the future. Shortly after the Lancaster House Agreement, suspicion was already widespread in the weeks running up to what ought to have been Zimbabwe's first free and fair democratic elections in 1980.

The post-'liberation' period in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Two critical factors influenced South African and Zimbabwe in their post-'liberation' periods³: the leaders' time in office and their outlooks on liberty. The post-'liberation' in South Africa (from 1994 onwards) and Zimbabwe (from 1980 onwards) is therefore dramatically different, as will be explained.

Time in office

Arguably, the key factor that had a major impact on how the world views the two leaders and which had an impact on how they ruled, is their time in power. "Political scientists claim, as is the case with milk, that political leaders run the risk of becoming 'sour'. The shelf-life of a president/prime minister is typically ten years (or even shorter)" (Hartwell, 2014). Consequently, the longer a leader stays in power, the more apt s/he will be to make mistakes, thereby becoming more unpopular. In a true democracy, it is unlikely that such a person will survive the ballot box. However, if a non-performing leader is adamant to stay in power, s/he will have to resort to greater nepotism/patronage, bribery, propaganda, intimidation, and even violence, thereby augmenting the souring process.

Mandela served as President of South Africa for only one term (which is five years) and meant that he left the office while he was still 'fresh'. In contrast, like sour milk, Mugabe has expired many years ago. He came into power in 1980 and he continues to rule the country. As Lord Acton famously wrote, "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." Mugabe's long stay in office inevitably created a situation in which he is more and more indebted to those that help to keep him in power. As a result, Zimbabwe is experiencing a greater disintegration of constitutional accountability and the ruling regime resorts to violence as a means to defend its own interests.

³ While South Africa's post-liberation period started with the first democratic elections in 1994, Zimbabwe never truly had a 'liberation' given the vast scale human rights abuses committed by the Mugabe regime. Thus, when this author refers to the 'post-liberation' period in Zimbabwe, it is strictly speaking only referring to liberation from the White Rhodesian regime. In Zimbabwe, 'liberation' fighters or heroes are those people who fought against the Rhodesian regime, not necessary those who fought for freedom and liberty for all Zimbabweans.

On freedom: self-rule versus liberal democracy

Another key factor that arguably influenced how Mandela and Mugabe executed their duties as leaders of their respective countries is their ideas of freedom. While Mandela stood for liberal democracy and equality, Mugabe was much more preoccupied with “self-rule” and “sovereignty” (Hartwell, 2014):

One of Mugabe’s problems is that he confuses independence with freedom. He likes to refer to himself and his party members as ‘liberators’ of Zimbabwe. Let us be clear: independence is strictly speaking self-governance and sovereignty over a specific territory. Freedom is much more extensive; it involves the absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government.

Mugabe’s interpretation of liberation gives him the impression that it is somehow justifiable to oppress Zimbabweans as long as the oppressor is a native of the country (although Mugabe would exclude White natives from this category). However ... true liberation and freedom is much broader than independence as it goes beyond self-rule. Freedom means that Zimbabweans should not be oppressed by anyone, irrespective of the origin of the rulers.

Mandela’s idea of liberation went beyond a mere change of guard from a White ruling elite to a Black ruling elite. His clearest expression of his idea of liberty was perhaps best made during a three hour long speech which he gave during the Rivonia Trial. In 1964, Mandela (1995: 438) famously declared; “I have fought against White domination, and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Mugabe’s interpretation of ‘liberty’ (strictly related to self-rule and sovereignty) is convenient as it is a way of silencing critics. Shortly before Mandela made his very clear expression on liberty, Mugabe, as mentioned, taught in Ghana (1958-60), the first African country to become independent. In Ghana, Mugabe was apparently heavily influenced by Nkrumah who led Ghana to independence. Interestingly, in 1964 Nkrumah amended Ghana’s constitution to ban all other political parties and make himself “president for life” (Oxford Business Group 2012: 17). Nkrumah only became the *de jure* president for life given that his regime was overthrown in a military coup in 1966, while Mugabe became Zimbabwe’s *de facto* president for life. Although Mugabe has given some space to opposition parties, he has more often than not used a combination of violence, intimidation, propaganda, and bribes to either destroy or co-opt them. Zimbabwe’s first democratic election in 1980 was preceded by intimidation by all of the major political parties. However, ZANU was considered by some to be “the worst culprit by far” (Meredith 2008: 10). Thus, the birth of what ought to have been a new democracy was tainted with blood from the very beginning.

Throughout the post-independence period, in addition to rigging the elections as a way of

window dressing Mugabe's version of democracy, he utilized his security sector to intimidate, torture or kill those that were outspoken against him and to punish those who voted for opposition parties (Barclay 2010, Hartwell 2013). Following the country's first elections, Mugabe began to systematically destroy ZAPU along with many innocent Ndebele during the Gukurahundi massacres. Consequently, ZAPU had to face further annihilation or become integrated into ZANU-PF and play a junior role. In the end, ZAPU joined ZANU-PF in 1987.

Mugabe's assertion that he is Zimbabwe's 'liberator' is therefore very dubious. While he has played an instrumental role (together with many individuals from ZANU and ZAPU) in liberating Zimbabwe from a White racist regime, he has not been able to extend liberty to all echelons of society. Mandela's (1995: 751) idea of freedom is much deeper because "to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

In an attempt to promote liberty, Mandela placed a lot of emphasis on respect for the country's Constitution as well as promoting separation of powers. In 1994, South Africa had its first democratic elections. The ANC won the election with 62% of the vote and the National Assembly elected Mandela as the country's first Black president. Mandela (1995: 743) claims that he was in fact "relieved that the ANC did not win a two-thirds majority because that would have enabled them to "write a constitution unfettered by input from others." Mandela (1995: 743) did not want an "ANC Constitution" and he desired a "true government of national unity".

Mugabe is however unable to distinguish between himself and the position of head of state and government. When reading about the history of Zimbabwe's Constitution (Vollan, 2013), it seems though that it was amended to protect Mugabe (as an individual), rather than limiting the powers of the President of Zimbabwe and strengthening the rights of the people that should be protected by the highest law of the land. Even the latest Constitution, which came into effect in 2013, accommodated Mugabe (again, as an individual). The new Constitution (2013) limits presidential terms to two five year terms, but it is not retroactive, which means that the nonagenarian Mugabe could still legally be in office for a few more years.

Embedded in the idea of constitutionalism is the need for government to respect the separation of powers. During his time in office, Mandela himself even appeared in court, demonstrating that he is not above the Constitution. Furthermore, "Mandela respected the courts, even when rulings by White judges from the Apartheid era went in favour of old Afrikaner Nationalists leaders" (Russell 2009: 9). Mugabe's long history in office together with his undying belief in his self-righteousness meant that he crushed the independence of the courts. He did this (amongst others) by signing decrees under the Presidential Powers Act (that would undermine court rulings), by threatening and removing judges that have made rulings "against" his interests, and by stacking the judiciary with yes-men and women (Goredema 2004: 99-118, Meredith 2008: 184-203).

Another key aspect of liberty and constitutionalism is the promotion and respect for media freedom. In fact, Mandela claimed that "A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference ... It must have

sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour. It must enjoy the protection of the constitution so that it can protect our rights as citizens” (Hartwell, 2014). Mandela therefore regularly exposed himself to the independent media for questioning during his time in office. In contrast, Mugabe has deliberately clamped down on the independent media, which has faced unlawful arrests, kidnapping of journalists, bombing and invasion of their property, and numerous threats. At the same time, Mugabe has effectively expanded state propaganda by beefing up ZANU-PF-controlled state media (Chuma 2004: 119-139).

Setting the tone: reconciliation versus continuation of violence

Politically, Mandela and Mugabe approached the immediate post-liberation periods in their respective countries differently, with important consequences.

For Mandela, violence against the Apartheid regime was a ‘last resort’. When South Africa’s conflict situation came to an end, violence was no longer viewed as a legitimate political tool. Moreover, given the brutality of the Apartheid period, there needed to be some form of healing process. The solution was found in promoting Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s idea of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Mandela’s promotion of the Rainbow Nation made South Africans from all walks of life feel included in the new nation building project. Many people from across the racial and ethnic divide were proud to call him ‘our President’. Furthermore, although the TRC had certain limitations, it arguably developed a foundation for reconciliation. It brought together almost 22,000 victims and perpetrators who broke the silence of the country’s violent past. No one could ever say that Apartheid did not happen (*see* Boraine 2008: 169-216, Krog, 2000).

At first, it seemed that Mugabe would promote national unity and reconciliation. In 1980 Mugabe stated (Raftopoulos 2004: x, xi):

If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself ... It could never be a correct justification that because the Whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the Blacks must oppress them today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practised by White against Black or Black against White. Our majority rule would easily turn into inhuman rule if we oppressed, persecuted or harassed those who do not look or think like the majority of us.

Unlike South Africa, Zimbabwe did not have a TRC. Instead, Mugabe’s rule was characterised by a wave of (blanket) amnesty processes. Every time Mugabe’s regime unleashed violence against its opponents, it would simply grant amnesty and clemency to the culprits. Furthermore, Mugabe’s idea of reconciliation did not last very long. In the post-independence period, which was supposed to have been a period of normalisation, Mugabe continued to see violence as an important tool to rope in his enemies, both real and imagined (Godwin, 2010). Mugabe even bragged once that he has a “degree in violence” (Meredith 2008: 241).

As early as 1982, after Mugabe's regime was criticized for torturing a Member of Parliament, he made it clear that he dislike legal systems that are against the use of torture in obtaining information. Mugabe said, "The law of evidence and the criminal procedure we have inherited is a stupid ass. It's one of those principles born out of the stupidity of some of the procedures of colonial times" (Meredith 2008: 55).

The climax of Mugabe's violence was during the Gukurahundi massacres, as it was a systematic attempt to destroy in whole or in part the Ndebele. The *Fifth Brigade*, which was trained by North Korea and consisted largely of former ZANLA fighters (belonging to ZANU) directly under the command of Mugabe, massacred close to 20,000 people. Mugabe called Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU's leader, a snake, creating the impression that Nkomo is dangerous, while dehumanising him in the same way that the extremist Hutu regime in Rwanda would later do to the Tutsi by calling them 'cockroaches' in the run up to the 1994 genocide. Mugabe said, "the only way to deal effectively with a snake is to strike and destroy its head" (Nkomo 1984: 223).

Following the massacre, there were several periods of state-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe, which largely corresponds to periods before, during and after elections. In 2000, the Mugabe regime created a new Constitution which they put forward in a referendum. One of the issues in the Constitution made it legal to acquire land without compensation. Mugabe suffered his first major political defeat. As a result, Mugabe's henchmen went ahead and forcefully and violently acquired land, presenting the so-called 'land-grab' as an issue between wealthy Whites and poor, landless Black Zimbabweans (Raftopoulos 2009: 210, 211).

While there were huge inequalities between Zimbabwe's White and Black population, which had to be rectified, the reality is that the land grab was used as a political tool to punish opponents (both Black and White) and to reward loyalty. As early as 1992, Ndabaningi Sithole, the original leader of ZANU, and James Chikerema who stood against Mugabe during an election, both lost their lands. Both of these individuals were Black, not White. Ministers, judges, political party members, chiefs of the security sector, and so on, have all been duly awarded with farms for their support of Mugabe (Meredith 2008: 125-127). More importantly, when the land grab escalated from 1999 onwards, it included a large scale displacement of approximately 400,000 Black farm workers and their family members (Hodzi et al, 2012: 83). Many of these Black farm workers were punished and tortured as they were accused of collaborating with their White 'masters' in voting for the MDC-T (which has been dubbed 'puppets of the West').

As time passed, the Zimbabwean state became more militarised while the security sector increasingly politicised (see Raftopoulos 2000: 201-232). Black Zimbabweans that were outspoken against Mugabe have been constructed by ZANU-PF as "dissidents" (Nkomo 1984: 230), "Black White men wearing the master's cap" (Meredith 2008: 155), neo-colonialists and Western "puppets" (Secka, 2013). In other words, when Mugabe's regime uses violence against these supposed enemies, the violence is 'legitimate' because, who can argue against fighting evil colonialism?

Wealth: modesty versus self-enrichment

The way that the two leaders used their offices in relation to their own welfare also tells us a lot about their respect (or lack thereof) for good governance.

While it is possible that Mandela's name has been used by some people to enrich themselves, Mandela himself lived a fairly modest life. In fact, after he became president, Mandela cut his annual ZAR 700,000 (roughly \$64,000) salary by approximately 20 percent because he thought it was "too high" (City Press, 2013). He also donated a third of his salary to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. After Mandela's death, it was decided that, in the public interest, his will should be made public. It was estimated that Mandela, arguably the most respected man on earth, had an estate valued at ZAR 46 million (approximately \$416,000) (Smillie, 2014).

This is not to say that Mandela's administration was completely flawless. For example, he came under heavy criticism for trying to defend Allan Boesak (a prominent liberation hero) who had been accused of embezzlement (Daley, 1999). Mandela also had a very cosy relationship with the controversial South African businessman, Sol Kerzner, who paid for Mandela's daughter's wedding (Blair, 2007). Some analysts further criticise Mandela for his "tolerance of underachievers" during his time in office (Russell 2009: 8).

In stark contrast to Mandela, there is almost no transparency in Zimbabwe with regards to disclosure of Mugabe's wealth. However, all evidence points to the fact that he has built a kleptocracy. In 2001, the U.S. Embassy in Zimbabwe allegedly reported to Washington that "the full extent of Mugabe's assets are unknown, but are rumoured to exceed \$1 billion in value, the majority of which are likely invested outside Zimbabwe" (Bhebhe, 2011). Thirteen years have passed since then, and while it is impossible to give a concrete figure of Mugabe's current wealth, it might be worth pointing out how his cronies have been benefitting under his watch. It was recently revealed that Mugabe's Permanent Secretary in the Information Ministry received 500,000 USD in monthly salaries, benefits and allowances (Kadungure, 2014). The above case is not an isolated case of corruption under Mugabe's watch. The Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (2012) published a report that documented a host of corruption scandals, allegedly and largely committed by Mugabe's associates, relatives and friends. The report alleges that Mugabe's reaction to corruption has been indifferent, and often, he rewarded individuals who were suspected of corruption.

Coming back to what has been argued earlier: Mandela had been in office for a much shorter period compared to Mugabe, which meant he did not have to depend on extensive bribes and patronage to maintain long-term support. Arguably, Mandela has also been much more principled. As mentioned earlier, his aim was to focus on democratisation of South Africa and building constitutionalism. For Mugabe, staying in power has been an important objective, which meant that he needed to reward supporters (while punishing opponents).

Economy: incremental development versus severe crisis

It is challenging to compare the impact of Mugabe and Mandela economic policies with one another, because their terms in office differ widely, giving Mugabe a much longer period over

which to deliver. Also, development (or underdevelopment) should be measured over a long period. Thus, one leader's choices and actions could have consequences long after s/he has left office. Nonetheless, here are some highlights throughout Mandela's and Mugabe's time in office:

Both leaders had the tremendous task of transforming their governments and economies into systems that would serve the country as a whole, as opposed to a White elite. When Mandela came into office, he introduced the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP). The plan was considered ambitious and aimed to extend housing, land, and social services. Mandela inherited a huge public debt with a budget deficit close to 9.5% of GDP, which meant RDP's funding became problematic (Johnson 2004: 214). By 1996, the RDP was abandoned and the ANC introduced the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme, which aimed to create economic distribution through economic growth.

Following Mandela's presidency the economy experienced the longest period of continuous economic expansion since the Second World War. By 2007, South Africa had a budget surplus. More importantly, by 2007, the ANC-led government had built 2.6 million houses; the number of households with electricity doubled; over 87% of South Africans had access to clean running water; and 14.1 million South Africans benefited from social welfare (Russell 2009: 81-93).

Overall, South Africa's economic performance has been much better than that of Zimbabwe's. This is true whether one compares the economies from the moment of 'liberation' (which is 1980 for Zimbabwe and 1994 for South Africa) to the first terms in office, or the long-term implications of their actions (see Table 1).

Table 1. GDP per capita (current US\$) in South Africa versus Zimbabwe

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| South Africa | 2,921 | 2,142 | 3,182 | 3,863 | 3,020 | 5,234 | 5,758 | 7,508 |
| Zimbabwe | 916 | 636 | 840 | 611 | 535 | 453 | 568 | 714 |

Source: World Bank 2014

In the immediate post-independence period Mugabe also focused on expanding education and healthcare for all Zimbabweans. Initially, the country had impressive results in increased literacy rates, reduced child mortality, and expansion of government services (see Mlambo, 1997). However, government spending was unsustainable and Zimbabwe's macroeconomic situation was threatened. According to the World Bank (2012), public expenditure made up approximately 45% of Zimbabwe's GDP during the 1980s. Consequently, Zimbabwe had to adopt the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which meant huge cuts in public programmes, civil service reforms, privatization of public enterprises and so forth. ESAP, combined with droughts in the early 1990s, did not improve the situation for the average Zimbabwean as de-industrialisation and unemployment increased, and the economy as a whole performed poorly, shrinking as much as 7.5% in 1992 (Saunders, 1996).

Later in the 1990s, Mugabe pushed ahead with his land reform programme, which had devastating consequences. Just before dollarisation of the economy in 2009, Zimbabwe was

suffering disturbing hyper-inflation: in December 2008, Zimbabwe's inflation rate was reported at "6.5 quindicillion novemdecillion percent ... [or alternatively expressed as] 65 followed by 107 zeros" (IRIN, 2011). In 2009, the International Red Cross (2009) stated, "Zimbabwe has one of the lowest life expectancy rates in the world, estimated by the United Nations at 34 years for women and 37 years for men."

Today, as can be seen from Table 1, the average Zimbabwean is poorer than what they were in 1980. The average South African is today almost twice as wealthy as they were in 1994. This does not mean that South Africa does not have serious social and economic challenges. Both Zimbabwe and South Africa experience high levels of poverty, huge unemployment and deep inequality, but it is much more severe in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

Although Mandela and Mugabe grew up in similar circumstances, they turned into very different individuals. One of the key reasons, as argued, relates to the choices that they made. While Mandela became the change that he wanted to see in South Africa, Mugabe's long rule in office saw the old man becoming more and more bitter. Mandela is rightfully hailed as one of the world's greatest leaders while the nonagenarian Mugabe continues to rule a broken country.

At the time of the controversial 2008 presidential run-off election in Zimbabwe, Mandela celebrated his 90th birthday he was saddened by the "the tragic failure of leadership in our neighbouring Zimbabwe" (BBC 2008). Mugabe for his part (Tambo, 2013) claims that "Mandela has gone too far in doing good to the non-Black communities ... he has been too much of a saint."

Mugabe's statement fails to acknowledge how successful Mandela was in building an inclusive state against all odds. Perhaps Mugabe is simply resentful of Mandela because the latter accomplished what the former never attained. Moreover, Mugabe's battle has not been directed solely against rich White Zimbabweans, he has violently clamped down on any form of opposition to his dictatorship.

When Mandela came to power, he was clear that he wanted an ANC based on the future and not ride on past glories. With regards to the ANC's first election campaign, Mandela (1995: 736) said; "I felt that our campaign should be about the future, not the past." He admitted that "some in the ANC wanted to make the campaign simply a liberation election, and tell the people: Vote for us because we set you free ... [but] we wanted people to vote for the ANC not simply because we had fought apartheid for eighty years."

In contrast to the future-orientated Mandela, Mugabe chooses to focus on ZANU-PF's past glories as if the entire nation must forever be indebted to the party for 'liberating' them. When listening to Mugabe's speeches one cannot help but think that he sounds like a teacher presenting a history lessons, in which he rehearses and glorifies Zimbabwe's liberation war for his audience.⁴ Mugabe's speeches also reveals that he is an old man occupied with the past because he knows he does not have much of a future to look forward to. More importantly, Mugabe talks

⁴ This author listened to many of Mugabe's live speeches in Zimbabwe from 2010-2013.

about the distant past because he is trying to reinterpret history over and over again. He does this because he has skeletons in his closet. In order to stay in power, Mugabe has to paint a picture of an alternative ‘truth’; one in which he is the hero and those who oppose him are the villains.

Mandela’s time in office (and in fact his life) proves that he was a great man. Mandela became the embodiment of the ideals that he preached for many years. He left behind strong democratic institutions (compared to Zimbabwe) that continue to be tested, which is one of his greatest legacies. Nevertheless, even though it could be argued that Mandela was a greater man compared to Mugabe, this does not necessarily mean that South Africa is a better country than Zimbabwe. South Africa still needs to learn a number of lessons that Zimbabweans have already forgotten. Currently, South Africa is experiencing a major crisis of leadership that threatens the relatively young democracy. Challenges to Chapter 9 institutions are worrying and if they persists could cause major setbacks for South Africa’s political and economic stability. However, Mandela’s extraordinary leadership means that South Africans have a very high benchmark to judge the actions of their leaders and institutions.

Mugabe used his time in office to develop a strong authoritarian regime. The Zimbabwean liberation hero’s legacy has been tainted by centralisation of power, corruption and mass murder. As a result, expectations in Zimbabwe are low and institutions have been hollowed out to the point where the separation of powers and the rule of law are meaningless. Even opposition politicians emulate Mugabe in certain ways as they have not yet had a leader who has mapped out an alternative democratic state where power comes with responsibilities and freedom is shared by all.

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